Multiculturalism in an Age of Mass Migration
—Multicultural Individualism versus Multicultural Collectivism

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I. Introduction

The term multiculturalism is recent, dating only from 1957 (N. Henry and K. Kurzak, A Multicultural Australia’ 2013). However, the concept of a successful society made up of many cultures is much older. In 1792 Thomas Paine gave an unmistakeably “multicultural” account of the migrants that had come together to form the United States:

If there is a country in the world where concord, according to common calculation, would be least expected, it is America. Made up as it is of people from
different nations, accustomed to different forms and habits of government, speaking different languages, and more different in their modes of worship, it would appear that the union of such a people was impracticable; but by the simple operation of constructing government on the principles of society and the rights of man, every difficulty retires, and all the parts are brought into cordial unison (Paine, 1792: Pt II).

Things were not that cordial of course, with Indian wars and slavery, but Paine’s essential point is undeniable; migrants from many parts bringing with them different cultural traditions, have created a viable state in the USA. What then are the “principles of society” that can bring people of disparate cultural backgrounds together in a functioning whole—whether in the USA or elsewhere?

There are two rival answers to this question, both expressed as metaphors. The first metaphor is that the state unified by the “melting pot,” the principle of cultural mixing. The second is that unity is achieved by the “salad bowl,” the maintenance of cultural distinctions within a common framework. To analyse these answers further, we can compare several cultures coming together in a single individual who personifies the melting pot, and several distinct cultures coming together in the common